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October 31, 2019

The Honorable Mark Esper
Secretary
United States Department of Defense
The Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Esper,

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019 included Section 582 – Award of Medals or Other Commendations to Handlers of Military Working Dogs that I authored. I am writing to inquire on the status of the implementation of this provision within our military service branches.

As you know, Military Work Dogs (MWDs) have been on the front lines of American conflicts since World War I when Sergeant Stubby, a short brindle bull terrier mutt, served in the Army's 102nd Infantry, 26th Yankee Division. Over the years, the roles and contributions of MWDs have expanded into each military service branch's critical operations. I introduced the Guardians of America's Freedom Medal Act to recognize our military K9 teams - both soldier and military working dog for their bravery, service and sacrifice in defense of our nation.

In May 2011, we learned about the essential role of Cairo, a highly intelligent and fearless Belgian Malinois and member of Navy SEAL Team 6, in the raid of Osama Bin Laden's Pakistani compound. Now, we are learning about another Belgian Malinois named Conan who played a critical role in the recent raid that led to the death of ISIS founder Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Before Baghdadi detonated an explosive vest to commit suicide, the MWD had chased him into a tunnel. The Belgian Malinois suffered injuries on the mission and is recovering. This is a reminder of the important role MWDs and their handlers play in upholding our national security.

I was surprised to see reports that President Trump publicly shared a fake image of himself presenting an award to Conan. Section 582 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019 requires each Secretary of a military department to carry out a program to provide for the award of one or more medals or other commendations to handlers and military working dogs. Can you provide me with an update on the progress of the military service branches to carry out Section 582 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019?

Military Working Dogs and their handlers are highly trained and skilled teams who have proven their valor and meritorious achievements on many occasions. As a grateful nation, it is time for us to recognize their outstanding contributions in defense of our country. I look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,


ROBERT MENENDEZ
United States Senator